

specter of 1898 as “a cautionary tale” for blacks.⁴⁹ Historian Melton A. McLaurin has suggested that the city’s black community preserved a counter-memory of the riot, but white city leaders refused to acknowledge this version in public discourse or commemoration.⁵⁰

Rewriting the Wilmington Race Riot: *Cape Fear Rising*

Philip Gerard’s *Cape Fear Rising* (1994) publicly challenged the popular narrative of the events of the fall of 1898. Gerard, a creative writing professor at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, mixed fact and fiction to tell the story of “what makes a community a community and how easy it is to fracture.”⁵¹ Gerard depicted the inner workings of the groups that conspired to overthrow the Fusion government. Hugh MacRae, J. Allan Taylor, and Alfred Moore Waddell emerge from *Cape Fear Rising* as the true architects of the violence. MacRae and Taylor orchestrate the coup, while Waddell mobilizes the masses and forms alliances that place him at the center of power in Wilmington.

The novelist pays particular attention to the experiences of Sam and Gray Ellen Jenks, a Philadelphia couple who move to Wilmington after Sam’s cousin, Hugh MacRae, secures a position for him with the Democratic Wilmington *Messenger*. Sam eventually realizes that MacRae expects him to support the white revolution. Haunted by alcoholism, sexual temptation, a failing marriage, and lies about his experiences in Spanish-American War, Sam implicitly supports the movement led by men whom he believes are much better than himself. As the riot reaches its conclusion, Sam, appalled by the senseless white-on-black violence, accepts the futility of resisting the tide of white rule. Gray Ellen, a liberal on race issues, teaches at Williston, the local African American school. As a result of her contact with the black community, she finds herself under the spell of Ivanhoe Grant, a mysterious mulatto minister who educates her about the reality of the color line and plays an important role in the escalation of racial tensions. The relationship between Gray Ellen and Grant leads to the banishment of the Jenkses.

Gerard credits MacRae and J. Allan Taylor with orchestrating the violence, despite the protests of fellow conspirators such as William Kenan, George Rountree, and Walker Taylor. Unlike Chesnutt, Gerard contends that the conspirators controlled the actions of the poor whites. MacRae keeps Mike Dowling and the Red Shirts under control before the election in order to avoid federal intervention. As they await the black response to the White Declaration of Independence, MacRae expresses his determination to suppress the black population through violence. He advises J. Allan Taylor, “They (African Americans) can all sign over the deeds to their houses, it wouldn’t change what we have to do.”⁵² Gerard repeats Waddell’s account of events at the *Daily Record* office; uncontrollable Red Shirts exceed the level of violence that he

⁴⁹ Catherine W. Bishir, “Landmarks of Power,” pg. 140, 147-155; Timothy Tyson, “Wars for Democracy: African American Militancy and Interracial Violence in North Carolina during World War II,” in *Democracy Betrayed*, pg. 254-255; Leslie H. Hossfeld, *Narrative*, pg. 66-67.

⁵⁰ Melton A. McLaurin, “Commemorating Wilmington’s Racial Violence of 1898: From Individual to Collective Memory,” *Southern Cultures* 6 (2000): pg. 41-42.

⁵¹ Scott Whisnant, “Violent White Revolt in 1898 Basis of New Historical Novel,” *Wilmington Sunday Star-News*, February 13, 1994, pg. 7A.

⁵² Gerard, *Cape Fear Rising*, pg. 319.